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RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 0448
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RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0776
RUEHGI/AMEMBASSY BANGUI 1288
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1249
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0378
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0958
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1616
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 2888
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 0660
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2066
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 1446
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0945
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0895

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/C and AF/PD, LONDON AND
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [CD](#)

SUBJECT: CHAD: CENSORSHIP UPDATE

REF: 06 NDJAMENA 01414

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Nearly one month after declaring a state of emergency throughout the country, the Government of Chad continues to talk a tough line vis--vis the national press. The state of emergency, under which the GOC has implemented a hard line censorship policy, has been extended for six months. Both Arabic and French media contacts have expressed grave concerns for the near term future of freedom of the press in Chad, and for the viability of their own media if strong censorship continues. Actual examples of censorship in newspapers appear to have diminished somewhat, potentially due in part to self-censorship on the part of struggling papers. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) As reported in reftel, the GOC considers censorship justified as long as Chad is in a state of war with rebel movements trying to destabilize the country. The GOC asserts that the state of emergency declared in late November extends to NDjamena due to rebel threats to attack the capital, as they did on April 13, 2006. However, because there have been no recent major security problems in NDjamena as a result of conflict in the east, several media contacts have reported their suspicion that the state of emergency was extended to NDjamena to allow the GOC to control the independent media.

¶3. (SBU) In a December 11 meeting (reftel), the Ambassador discussed the censorship issue with Minister of Communication Moussa Doumgor, expressing USG concerns about the clear threats to the free press in Chad. The meeting clearly resonated with the Minister, who mentioned it and the Ambassador on several occasions during a December 27 television interview. The Minister The Ambassador of the United States told me what the impact [of censorship] on Chadian public opinion would be, stated the Minister. [But] our press is not yet capable of assuming its national responsibilities; because its not

about pleasing the outside world its about contributing to making things better in Chad. In the current context, the minister continued, we can close a radio station. Who will oblige us to reopen it? Neither France, nor the United States, nor the UN.

¶4. (SBU) After declaring a state of emergency in late November, the government immediately began to require all media (print and radio) to submit their reporting for review by the HCC (High Council for Communication, the GOCs press regulatory board) and the Ministry of Communication. Whole articles on the front pages of several independent newspapers (both French and Arabic) were blacked out in early December. Initially, newspapers covered these black areas with the word censored, but stopped after a warning from the GOC that censored material should only appear in black.

¶5. (SBU) Following a two-week hiatus in protest of government censorship policy, the independent newspapers are publishing again. The first run after the hiatus saw many censored articles. However, the latest editions of the most prominent independent papers have not been censored. Several French language journalists reported to the Public Affairs Section (PAS) that they felt obliged to return to the marketplace for the good of their papers. They believed that they would go out of business forever if they stopped publishing for too long, and would certainly lose their advertising base. At the same time, French language media leaders reported to the PAS that they no longer feel

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the content of their papers reflects their editorial line. They have significantly softened their direct criticisms of the government, and stopped reporting on events in eastern Chad almost entirely.

¶6. (SBU) Journalists in the Arabic-language media also spoke openly with the PAS about their concerns. The Arabic-language press stopped publishing for two weeks to protest government censorship. However, staff at three Arabic-language papers reported receiving an indirect message from the GOC, via press officers at the presidency, that they would be considered as siding with the rebels if they did not publish. As a result, the journalists report, at least three Arabic-language papers plan to publish this week, but not report on domestic politics or events in the East. Similarly, Arabic-language programming on RNT (National Chadian Radio) and FM Liberte (independent) now consists only of social and cultural programs, and Chadian traditional music.

¶7. (SBU) Al Jazeera's Arabic language service has been filling the media void in Chad in recent weeks. They now have a full-time correspondent covering domestic politics in Chad, and a correspondent on the eastern border region who has at several points been embedded with rebels. The domestic correspondent was briefly detained by GOC security forces last week, then released, apparently without clear cause. Al Jazeera's correspondent on the border, meanwhile, conducted a lengthy interview with UFDD rebel leader Mahamat Nouri, broadcast on Al Jazeera on January 2 and 3.

¶8. (SBU) Official censorship has also touched Chadian musical tastes. Sudanese music, which is very popular in Chad, especially among Arabic speakers and Muslims, is no longer played on the radio, nor at official parties or events, by official decree. According to a close contact with strong government ties, the absence of Sudanese music significantly dampened the ambiance at an official New Year's Eve celebration attended by President Deby,

many cabinet members and high-ranking military, and former rebel leader Mahamat Nour.

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